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ABSTRACT

Innovative educators teach creatively while showing compassion and respect for their students. Innovation allows educators to apply their unique talents to create a stimulating environment where learning is fun and exciting. Innovative teachers continually evaluate lesson plans and make modifications to allow for change. They make decisions affecting students at the grassroots level. Innovative teachers encourage parent and community participation. Children often come to school with emotional, physical, and cultural baggage, and teachers must take responsibility for them while being understanding of their unique needs. It is important for everyone in the community to be involved in education, regardless of age or social status. Suggestions from California teachers on improving the educational system include extending the school day, revamping the bureaucratic process to give teachers more authority, revising tenure, downsizing administration, rewarding great teachers, reducing class size, avoiding labels, offering more charter schools, empowering paraprofessionals, and providing more field experience and mandatory inner city experience for all teachers. The paper describes three schools' approaches to innovative teaching: Jaime Escalante, a former East Los Angeles mathematics teacher; Velda Correa, principal of an elementary school in Weslaco, Texas; and Marva Collins, director of a private school in Chicago, Illinois. (SM)

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ED 416 188

An Entrepreneur *in the Classroom!*

INNOVATIVE TEACHING

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Anderson, Dobbs, Jenkins and Short are co-authors of "Our Educational Melting Pot: Have We Reached the Boiling Point?", to be released by ICA Publishing (ICA, Inc.), May 1997.

"Why is change so difficult? People who hold four aces never want a new deal."
Principal

INNOVATIVE TEACHING:

Entrepreneurship in the classroom

As corporate downsizing occurs across the nation, more and more people are opting to become entrepreneurs, filling needs by creating businesses where none existed previously. This unprecedented activity has produced the positive ripple effect of introducing innovative teaching to schools across the country. The same zeal for independence shown by individuals in business applies to creative risk takers in the education world. They are called **INNOVATIVE TEACHERS**.

Just as an entrepreneur can 'turn on a dime' making changes affecting their business, innovative teachers do the same in the classroom, teaching creatively while showing compassion and respect for their students. Let us explore the meaning of innovative teaching and its strategies.

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INNOVATIVE TEACHING:

What is It?

As in the case of the entrepreneurial world, innovative teaching allows educators to apply their unique individual talents to create a stimulating environment where learning is fun and exciting. Lesson plans are continually evaluated for effectiveness and modifications made to allow for changing conditions. Entrepreneurs recognize skills and talents in those around them and act to capitalize on them; innovative teachers also recognize in their student's abilities in varying degrees and provide a conducive environment to develop the child's individual skills and talents.

Innovative teachers are able to make decisions affecting their students at the grass roots level, eliminating the layers of bureaucratic "hoop jumping." Frustration is converted to action and the

"We want schools to be a state of mind, not a place; we want students to return to contribute and parents to pitch in."

Teacher

"I had to motivate the children to create a desire for learning. I had to make them understand why it was important to learn. And I had to make them feel worthwhile and confident."

Marva Collins

results encourage increased innovation and creativity.

"Charter schools have grown out of this need for innovation. They are public schools funded with tax money, but formed by parents, teachers and community organizations. Depending on state laws charter schools gain varying amounts of freedom from regulations that dictate who they can hire and who they can teach." (USA Today, 1995)

Despite their success, charter schools face opposition from organizations such as the NEA (National Education Association), many local teacher associations and unions that fear losing control of individual teachers, parents and administrations. On the surface the NEA supports charter schools most recently sponsoring six charter schools across the country. Reports from The Center for Education Reform, however, indicate state educational associations are blocking the implementation of the charter schools at the local level.

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"The only fragile things around me are the egos of teachers, tragically defensive about their practices and sandbagged in their rooms against the rising tides of change, inevitable change."

Teacher

INNOVATIVE TEACHERS:

Who are They?

People enter the teaching field for a variety of reasons. They love children, they want to contribute to society, or they want to help the next generation achieve its potential. Teachers are innovators by nature. However, many lose their creative drive to provide stimulating lessons and material. This can be attributed to resistance from administrators and tenured teachers who feel threatened by change demanding extra effort on their part or requiring learning new skills. Some new educators are discouraged. "One out of three teachers will leave the teaching profession within three to five years." (USA Today 1996)

Individuals who have surmounted resistance and opposition to innovative teaching methods include: Jaime Escalante, former math teacher, Garfield High School, East Los Angeles: Marva Collins, founder Westside Preparatory School, Chicago: Velda Correa, Principal of Rico Elementary in Weslaco, Texas. These creative teachers were plagued by dismal physical facilities, scarcity of supplies, lack of community and administrative support. Undaunted these teachers enabled their students to succeed through their shared philosophy that all children can succeed.

INNOVATIVE TEACHING:

How is it Done?

"Educators are rarely encouraged to learn from their mistakes because we feel we must deny we've ever failed."

Teacher

MTV, video games, volatile family relationships, gangs, drugs and more compete with a teacher for the child's attention. An innovative teacher encourages students to learn by demonstrating respect and compassion for them. An important element in helping the child to make good decisions is parental participation. The families in the school district are the customers. They are the ones paying for the services of the teacher. It is the job of the teacher to do everything possible to satisfy those needs, as would the entrepreneur. Customer service is crucial to the bottom line and the teacher's bottom line is the success of each and every child. Parents dissatisfied with the end result need to be vocal and find the solution, before the child slips on through.

"Perhaps the best parent involvement of all is choice"
Teacher

Ways to reach each child in the Classroom

- Listen to what the students are saying with respect and compassion
- Assess needs on an individual basis
- Expose them to new ideas and situations
- Take field trips to government and private places of business to show how the outside world functions
- Invite local business people to mentor
- Encourage corporate sponsorship of classes
- Challenge their minds to learn and explore, not just to regurgitate information
- Have high expectations
- Enjoy your job and your customers

INNOVATIVE TEACHING:

Three Approaches

As a former Mathematics teacher at Garfield High School in East Los Angeles, Jaime Escalante's philosophy and dedication enabled his basic Math students to prepare and pass an advanced placement Calculus exam and gain a ticket out of the barrio. Mr. Escalante persevered, despite intense opposition from his fellow educators. He overcame intense pressure to teach conventionally and refused to lower the standards and expectations. His belief in his students gave them the motivation to excel, surpassing odds placed against them by other teachers and the school's administration.

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"Every child deserves a great education—not a good education, but a great education. We don't like to settle for second-best. Why should we ask these children to?"

Velda Correa

"I had to motivate the children, create a desire for learning. I had to make them understand why it was important to learn. And I had to make them feel worthwhile and confident."

Marva Collins

"I think I can, I think I can. I think I can."

The Little Engine Who Could

In 1994, Rico Elementary School opened in Weslaco, Texas to serve one of the state's most economically depressed areas where many homes did not have electricity or running water.

But the students' impoverished background made no difference to Principal Velda Correa. She made it her goal to find out how she could best serve the community. At the beginning of the school year, Correa and her colleagues took a field trip through the 12 *colonias* the school served. They knocked on doors and asked, "what can your school do for you?"

Turning the traditional school week on its ear, Principal Correa and her staff opened the school to the community after school hours and on weekends. Parents were encouraged to come with their children, to have breakfast and to take classes themselves. They learned to speak English, study for their GED and participate in parenting classes.

Westside Preparatory School started when dissatisfied parents in Chicago's Garfield Park approached Marva Collins to be the director for a private school. The parents were unhappy with the

7

"None of you has ever failed. School may have failed you. Well, goodbye to failure, children. Welcome to success. But you must help me to help you. If you don't give anything, don't expect anything. Success is not coming to you- you must come to it."

Marva Collins

public school system. Ms. Collins was also ready for a change after teaching fourteen years in Chicago Public Schools. These parents wanted their children to have a chance in the world, regardless of income level and they knew success in Marva Collins. Taking an approach to teaching that if a child did not succeed it was not the child that failed, but the teacher who had failed the student, she took a personalized approach to each child. Lesson plans were designed to each child's needs and abilities and her expectations were high. This approach allowed the students to believe in themselves, express their opinions and to respect and help other students.

INNOVATIVE TEACHING:

Why should it be Done?

Every child deserves to have an educational experience that enables him or her to love learning. A creative and compassionate teacher can change the direction of a student's educational path. The child's natural abilities could go undetected if the teacher is unable to connect.

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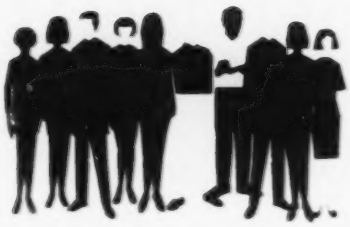

"In teaching, as in business, it is the sizzle that sells the steak."

Rachel Laufer Anderson

Teacher

Does the child fail or does the teacher fail the child who learns differently than the rest of the class? Children often come to school with emotional, physical and cultural baggage. From homes where some are neglected, abused or subjected to alcoholism or drugs. No one expects the teacher to affect or change every child, but if just one more student can be motivated to learn, one will fall through the cracks of society. Children come to class if they feel it is worthwhile. It is the teacher's job to market his or her wares to generate interest in learning, for in teaching, as in business, it is the "sizzle that sells the steak."

Students deserve a high standard of accountability despite the ravages of poverty and the disintegrating family unit. "We need a new covenant: All adults are responsible for the young.. All adults take their responsibilities seriously. All children can and must learn." (China Breakers Conference 1993)

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The surrounding community should support the local schools through volunteerism in the classroom because a single teacher can no longer

10

meet the needs of today's students. The community has a stake in the success of its young people, unlike previous generations. Today, youth face problems that didn't exist ten years ago. The nuclear family no longer has the influence it had in the past because of divorce, two-income families, substance abuse and violence. Every community member regardless of age or social status, has something to offer our youth, just as every child has skills and talents to be discovered in the classroom.

"School reform is not just about winning the brain race it is about ennobling the human race."

Principal

INNOVATIVE TEACHING:

Reflections

President John F. Kennedy said in his inaugural address, "Ask not what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country." These words galvanized a generation of Americans to participate in public service. The same enthusiasm can be gleaned from the ranks of the community and the corporate world. Retired individuals with time on their hands, and a lifetime of experiences, can become tutors and mentors in the classroom. People with valuable experience finding themselves

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on their own due to business downsizing are prime candidates to put their entrepreneurial skills to work in the classroom if we can accomplish downsizing of the teacher certification process.

To summarize, we propose this new directive:

Teachers:

Ask not what your profession can do for you but what you can do for this nation, its children and our future!

THINK ABOUT--------

Northern California Teachers respond to "Give one suggestion to improve the education system"

- Extend the School Day to accommodate Student and Family Needs.
- Revamp Bureaucratic Process -- give teachers more authority.
- Eliminate or Revise Tenure to remove those who are obsolete
- Downsize Administration
- Recruit Teachers from outside the profession and credit life experiences.
- More Community Involvement
- Reward Great Teachers—Remove Bad Teachers
- Cut bureaucracy and Teacher Training hurdles. Einstein or Hemingway couldn't teach without 4 years or more of college for certification, yet who would be more qualified.
- Shorten High School Periods and offer more choice, more classes
- Reduce class size throughout K-12
- 'Break the Box' that fits us into molds. We are individuals, Teach to individuals
- Remove 90% of credential classes
- More Charter Schools less Union opposition
- More Parental Involvement and make parents feel welcome
- Allow paraprofessionals to teach from their experience
- More field experience and mandatory inner city experience for all teachers
- "First God invented idiots, but that was just for practice. Then he created school boards" ---Mark Twain

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Glasser, W. The Quality School Teacher

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Laufer Anderson, Dobbs, Jenkins and Bonner Short are co-authors of "Our Educational Melting Pot: Have We Reached the Boiling Point?", to be released by ICA Publishing (ICA, Inc.), May 1997.

About the Authors

Rachel Laufer Anderson has a B.S. in Criminal Justice from the University of Wisconsin. She currently teaches Reading at Marshall Middle School in Stockton, California and is pursuing her teaching credential. Ms. Laufer Anderson has a varied background including work in a Wall Street firm, a stint as a Navy photographer and operating her own landscape design business.

Christine Dobbs is a substitute teacher in Stanislaus County, California. She has been teaching since October, 1996. She is married and has two children. Prior to pursuing her teaching credential, Ms. Dobbs worked in retail management and operated her own daycare business. Ms. Dobbs intends to teach elementary school aged children.

Brigid Jenkins currently teachers pre-school children in Lodi, California using a curriculum that she developed and implemented. She has taught first, second and fourth grade. She is married and has four children. Prior to pursuing her teaching credential, Ms. Jenkins owned and operated a successful catering business.

Patricia Bonner Short is a full-time mother and student. She has a B.A. degree in Recreation Therapy from the University of the Pacific, Stockton, California. Prior to pursuing her teaching credential, Ms. Short worked for six years in the mental health field. She has two children and plans on teaching high school aged students.

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